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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM: AMEMBASSY, SAN JOSE

DISP. NO. 21

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DATE: August 29, 1952

REF:

EXCISE

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SUBJECT: Conversation with [redacted] to Guatemala.

Some time ago, when visiting [redacted] he expressed his preoccupation over the communist influence in Guatemala and asked me if I would be interested in talking with [redacted] who was returning to explain personally the situation with regard to the ODECA meeting. I naturally expressed my pleasure at the opportunity, and on Wednesday evening, August 27, I had a long private conversation with [redacted]

He was very frank in telling me his views about the Guatemalan situation. I feel they will be of interest to the Department and our Embassies in Central America.

According to [redacted] he views the situation in Guatemala as very serious. He claims that the leading political group in Guatemala can be divided into two categories (1) a small group of real communists led by José Manuel FORTUNY, Secretary General of the Guatemalan Communist Party, and Victor Manuel GUTIERREZ, Secretary General of the Labor Confederation, CGTG; (2) the other group is made up of various so-called revolutionary groups whose personal interests and ambitions coincide with the communists and therefore they are all cooperating in the control of the country. Similarly the Army, he said, can be divided into two groups. Parenthetically he remarked that the troops did not count because they are a poor, uneducated mass and that what he referred to is the division within the officer group. All the high officers are affiliated politically with the present regime and will support the communists because of Colonel Arbenz, who is their leader. [redacted] Arbenz is 100% communist, despite all statements he may make confidentially to foreign diplomats to the contrary. Of the larger group of low ranking officers, he believes 80% are not communists or supporters of communism but as there is no real leader among them, they are too apathetic to take any actio by themselves. According to [redacted] nothing can happen in Guatemala wi[illegible]

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the Army's help. The people are not strong enough. The Church has been able to do little. Business interests are not united and the wealthy people are afraid and not willing to risk their necks. Without some real incident, which would cause a strong public reaction and unify the lower officer element with the people, any attempts to overthrow the present government in Guatemala, he feels are doomed to failure. Not only that, but he is extremely worried because little by little the people in general are being brought around to accept communist ideas and communist moves. Slowly but surely by such acts as the Agrarian Law, he feels Arbenz and his communist helpers are consolidating themselves in power. He believes that we must not be fooled by such acts, which may seem to represent satisfactory liberal advances, since when they are put into force by the communists they get the credit and are just the first steps toward complete control and later oppression of the people. They are just the first moves to get the people on their side. Because of this the opposition, which is conservative, does not understand the United States attitude in many cases, which therefore plays into communist hands either by its tacit approval or passive attitude toward such laws.

Referring to his earlier statement that only a really serious incident could arouse Army elements to support the people against communism, he stated that he believed the Government was now aware of this danger. He said, he himself had seen communist shock troops, several of them Cuban pistoleros, waiting in his hotel in Guatemala the night before the large non-communist demonstration was to take place. He feels that these shock troops had orders to act as agents provocateur leading possibly to a massacre of innocent people, but at the last minute the Government reconsidered its plan to terrorize the populace in favor of a more lenient attitude because of the fear that the Army would not stand by it.

With the fall of Prío Socarras in Cuba, [redacted] feels that Guatemala is isolated in the Caribbean area and Foreign Minister Galich's postponement of the ODECA meeting has opened the way for all of Central America to help put the pressure on Guatemala. The only possible stumbling block that he sees is Foreign Minister Canessa of Salvador whom he feels to be too interested in making an international name for himself to see what is really going on in Guatemala. On the other hand, he considers that the Salvadoran Ambassador to Guatemala, Mr. FUNES, is one of the best informed of the Latin American diplomats there and he knows that Funes is a personal friend of President Osorio and has his ear. If any move is to be made, however, he believes it will have to be made soon because should Figueres win the elections in Costa Rica, the line will be broken.

B1, EB

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Referring to Figueres, he expressed the opinion that Don Pepo was well organized and had a large number of supporters. He seemed afraid that Figueres would win the elections, although he thought President Ulate was carefully building up a case against Figueres. Unfortunately the opposition to Figueres was divided and because of this many people, although admitedly anti-Figueres, could not make up their minds who to vote for and might even refuse to vote, thus favoring Figueres by their inaction. Figueres, he said, would always be a danger to Costa Rica because he would always be mixed up with the revolutionary crowd, including such astute individuals as Betancourt. On the other hand, Figueres was known for breaking his promises and not living up to his commitments. Because of this, he believed that Arbenz in Guatemala did not favor Figueres, preferring actually to help the outlawed communist party in Costa Rica, Vanguardia Popular. He again referred to his belief that Arbenz was a true communist and one of the worst ones of the lot.

Because all the countries in the Caribbean area are now against Guatemala [redacted] suggested that the time had come for the United States to put the pressure on it by getting its companies, such as the United Fruit Company, Tropical Radio and Pan American Airways, to institute an economic squeeze. He believed that the people would not react against the United States despite the propaganda such an economic boycott would occasion and that all the other countries would be glad to support us. The implication was, however, that their action would be passive while we would be expected to carry the ball as usual. B1, EB

Finally [redacted] and said that his country really needed help in controlling them since the police here were no good in matters of vigilance and really had little idea about what the communists were doing or trying to do. The [redacted] borders were wide open and communists and revolutionaries could enter and travel about [redacted] freely with almost no surveillance at all. The secret service in Guatemala, on the other hand, he said, was excellent as it was also in Salvador, but not in [redacted] B1, EB B1, EB B1, EB

Philip F. Williams
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

ccs: MID & CA Missions.

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